

Team mentoring – a vehicle to foster and encourage ethics and accountability in design education

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Abstract

As design educators it is imperative that we make informed decisions for which we should be held accountable as we influence our students and their potential careers. Our students should feel that they are living a life that matters and one of the ways in which we can make this happen is for the team (graphic design educators) within our department, to feel the same way. For this reason, we chose the theory of team mentoring to help foster and encourage collaboration and accountability.

The concept of ‘team mentoring’ is one that has been utilised in various disciplines and involves several faculty members, perhaps even an entire department, who act as the mentors to support the development of new faculty member(s). There is a formal organisational commitment to the development of the mentees as well as the fostering of a climate that is supportive of mentoring relationships and professional development (Hanover Research, 2014).

Furthermore, Kaye and Jacobson (1996) suggest that in team mentoring, a formal mentor does not always lead members, rather members provide mentoring to each other. That being said, Wenger (1998) postulates that community of practice requires leadership (even if this leadership is informal) in order for real progress to take place. The research suggests that team mentorship requires community of practice as a guide to promote direction and focus and this ultimately provides the mentors and mentees with an environment in which their learning can flourish (Knouse, 2001).

Taking this into account, we focused on a post-modernist approach as highlighted by Kilgore who suggested that the learning within this approach is based on the fact that there is not, “one kind of learner, not one particular goal for learning, not one way in which learning takes place, nor one particular environment where learning occurs” (Kilgore 2001). Therefore it is vital to realise the importance of the individual even when dealing with an institution because the establishment requires the buy-in from their staff in order to function as a cohesive unit in attaining goals.

The team of graphic design lecturers therefore functions together in providing a fair platform where ideas, thoughts and experiences are shared, thereby creating a safe environment to foster a human-centred design culture within the institution. This network of creativity allows for the co-creation of a shared design ethos which essentially strengthens the core values of the institution and filters through to the students who are facilitated by this team.

Our research began with a small team through which we utilised the methodology of action research in which to test our theories. Initial findings suggest that design educators are more prepared to sharing ideas and experiences when placed into the informal setting of team mentoring – so long as they feel safe and equal within the team-mentoring relationship.

In this paper we investigate how introducing team mentoring in a design education faculty creates an environment of mutual agreement where design educators are encouraged to collaborate and be accountable for their actions.

Keywords: *Team mentoring; post-modern education; collaboration; professional accountability; community of practice; graphic design*

Introduction

This paper aspires to reveal that introducing team mentoring in a design education faculty, will lead to positive contributions within the department. Furthermore, we investigate whether it creates an environment where design educators are encouraged to collaborate and be accountable for their actions.

Within our context, design education involves a close-knit group of lecturers and students, who come from various multi-cultural backgrounds, with differing socio-economic environments. It becomes imperative that a definitive foundation of ethics is created, and the aspect of accountability fostered, within our lecturing unit so that we are able to create a holistic environment in which this is dispersed among the learners.

As lecturers who facilitate 21st century students, we believe that this is essential in forming a new generation of ethically accountable designers. These designers should possess a solid academic foundation in order to understand why we do what we do within our field of expertise. In order to achieve this, we needed to research and investigate a potential mode or vehicle in which to foster these desirable traits. We postulated that using the concept of mentoring (specifically team mentoring), we would be able to examine and explore the individual core values that each of the lecturers possess and use this information to build a foundation of shared experiences and beliefs. We would then use this foundation to grow from; specifically in terms of creating a base of ethical considerations in line with those of the institutions.

This paper therefore, focuses on the exact definition of team mentorship rather than considering other similar approaches to team interactions - such as coaching or group work - which we felt would not benefit the individuals within the team due to the lack of personalisation. Team mentorship is therefore more suited due to the fact that it acts as a methodology for facilitating the learning of a team where together, the individuals define mutual learning goals and work simultaneously to guide each other through a process to facilitate their learning. The team essentially learns from each other's experiences and knowledge (Zachary 2015). The culture of mentorship also enhances how each employee relates to each other within the whole of the institution and ultimately how they connect with the institution itself. A mentoring culture can be described as one in which the following appears; accountability, alignment, communication, demand, education and training, infrastructure, multiple venues, role modeling, a safety net and ultimately, value and visibility (Zachary 2002).

Literature Review

Design Ethics

As professional designers, first and foremost, each member of the mentoring team originates from a background steeped in design theories, practices and beliefs. These beliefs have developed from experience within the world of design as well as from those who influenced each of us as emerging designers. While no hard and fast rules have existed in terms of ethics and accountability, a professional who works in the field of creative design is expected to adhere to the societal accepted principles of integrity. Furthermore, it is expected that through this integrity, we respect those around us, whether they are other designers, clients, consumers or society at large (MacAvery Kane 2010).

As integrity is imperative to our careers as designers and ultimately design educators (sharing our beliefs with our students), we look to organisations and forums that are able to help define a set of guidelines in which we can remain true to the fundamental principles of this honesty we strive for.

One such organisation is AIGA, the professional association for design¹ that has developed a set of standards for professional practice. The following guidelines identify the designer's responsibility towards the public and resonate with our faculty's approach towards a designer's responsibility to the public. AIGA (2010) describes the designer's responsibility to the public as follows;

1. "A professional designer shall avoid projects that will result in harm to the public.
2. A professional designer shall communicate the truth in all situations and at all times; his or her work shall not make false claims nor knowingly misinform. A professional designer shall represent messages in a clear manner in all forms of communication design and avoid false, misleading and deceptive promotion.
3. A professional designer shall respect the dignity of all audiences and shall value individual differences even as they avoid depicting or stereotyping people or groups of people in a negative or dehumanizing way. A professional designer shall strive to be sensitive to cultural values and beliefs and engages in fair and balanced communication design that fosters and encourages mutual understanding".

As designers and facilitators who share our experience and design knowledge not only with each other, but with our students, we identify with these guidelines of professional practice. Furthermore, as design educators it is imperative that we make informed decisions for which we should be held accountable as we influence our students and their potential careers. For this reason, we chose the theory of team mentoring to help foster and encourage collaboration and accountability within the department.

The problem lies in that the concept of ethics in design, as a whole, tends to be very subjective. Melissa Gillard (2012) further iterates this in her article titled, *Business Ethics & Graphic Design* in which she notes the issues we encounter when dealing with ethics in design. The three main issues that we face, as designers, are the aspects of morals and ethics, the lack of accountability, and the lack of control we have over work we produce for clients. Her first point is outlined as follows: "*Ethics are subjective. Morals are personal. So we cannot determine an ethical standard for everyone to follow when we all have our own belief systems. If that were the case, it would be law not ethics*" (Gillard 2012).

This is profound and when you have a number of individuals working together, teaching another set of individuals and each individual comes with a unique set of ethics and morals, it can lead to an unsteady framework, based on this uncertain foundation, from which to work.

Taking this into consideration, we believed that the concept of team mentoring would present a unique post-modern opportunity to share, build and provide change within the department and ultimately positively influence the program offered to students. This would ultimately start with taking our unique individual backgrounds into consideration and begin to create a shared ethical understanding in order to provide the basis for an ethical culture that we could all adhere and aspire to.

Mentoring

In terms of our team of lecturers, it is imperative to ensure that each member is a unique individual who remains true to themselves and they offer something dynamic to the relationship of the group in order for the team's overall success. In order to understand this better, let us consider the term, *Mentorship*.

¹ Although the association was founded in 1914 as the American Institute of Graphic Arts the association's website (<http://www.aiga.org/about/>) firmly states that AIGA is today simply known as "AIGA, the professional association for design".

Mentorship as a concept originated in the Greek mythology. In the ancient tale, Odysseus went to war with the Trojans and left his son Telemachus under the guidance of his friend Mentor, who with his wisdom and character guided and took good care Telemachus. Ever since, Mentor's name has since become synonymous with someone who guides, teach, and encourage a less experienced person (Hansman 1999).

Mentoring thus describes a process whereby a more experienced person acts as a guide to a less experienced mentee within a reciprocal relationship. A mentor will typically provide the mentee with appropriate and relevant knowledge; advice; challenge; counsel; and support about career opportunities and help to develop the mentees potential through a facilitated process (Agunloye 2000). We notice these types of relationships emerging within our department throughout the process. However, it is important to remember that each character remains true to themselves and they individually learn from each other within the team relationship.

Mentoring relationships can be formal or informal. Formal mentor relationships are usually organised in the workplace where an organisation matches mentors to mentees for developing careers. Informal mentor relationships usually occur spontaneously and are largely psychosocial; they help to enhance the mentee's self-esteem and confidence by providing emotional support and discovery of common interests. In the context of higher education mentoring relationships can be one-on-one or even a team identified to work with new faculty members for the purpose of networking, professional and personal development (Premkumar 2007). Traditionally, one-on-one mentoring is the most common form of mentoring, however it is not always possible or the best solution. Alternative mentoring models should be considered such as team or group mentoring that offers some unique benefits to both the mentors and mentees.

Team Mentoring

In team mentoring several faculty members, perhaps even an entire department, acts as the mentors to support the development of new faculty member(s). In team mentoring there is a formal organisational commitment to the development of the mentees as well as the fostering of a climate that is supportive of mentoring relationships and professional development of everyone involved (Hanover Research 2014).

The multiple mentor approach within team mentoring holds several benefits to all involved. The unique skills of many individuals can be shared and capitalised on, which in turn fosters the spirit of teaching and sharing to enhance development. Team mentoring therefore supports team building and mutual competency development within a group (Ambrose, 2003). Furthermore, the roles of the mentors closely relates to the roles of a good educator. These roles include the mentor being an advisor, guide, peer, friend and teacher (Premkumar 2007). Taking this into account, we, as lecturers of graphic design, took to the principles of academia in the 21st century to compare it to our own situation. In this post-modernist educational environment, particularly within a higher education context, the educator would have to facilitate a variety of learning style preferences to enable the development of each individual (Du Toit 2013).

It thus seemed logical that the same principle should be applied in mentoring.

Furthermore, this team or multiple or collaborative action research approach is seen as a beneficial and contemporary mentoring method in which the benefits have been documented by many researchers such as Beaulieu, Lemke & van Helden. By providing the platform for a strong team mentorship approach, the foundations could be laid for collaboration within the action research. This has been said to *"support teachers' professional development, help teachers increase their level of self-efficacy and also develop their intellectual capacities, in order to cope with the demands of everyday classroom life."* (Manesi & Betsi 2013). This shows that through the team interactions, reflection can take place which affords the individual lecturers the opportunity to continually assess their own performance, within the team mentorship environment, share these experiences and

thoughts with their peers and then make further connections to enhance their performance and teaching strategies (Wenger 1998; Wenger 2006; Gannon-Leary & Fontainha 2007).

Ethics in Team Mentoring

According to the Centre for Clinical and Translational Science (CCTS), ethics becomes apparent within the dynamic of the mentee-mentor relationship in that mentors have the responsibility of being teachers and role models who should exude the appropriate ethical behavior and practice this as academic professionals. The mentor's ethics would involve the adopting of reasoned and moral judgement in examining a subject's responsibility in specific situations (CCTS, 2015). Therefore, as design educators in the team mentoring dynamic, note that it is imperative that as a mentor, we realise we have a moral obligation in guiding mentees about responsible conduct through ethically sound decisions within the realm of higher education, as well as the larger world of design. Furthermore, it is expected that both the mentee and mentor are responsible for behaving ethically within the team mentor relationship by respecting each other's opinions and valuing the input from all parties (CCTS 2015).

Furthermore, the following advices as highlighted by the CCTS (2015)², are required to foster ethical behavior in the mentee-mentor relationship:

- **Promoting mutual respect and trust** – The two mentors acted as team members throughout the process by sharing their own goals, fears, ethical dilemmas and more rather than enforcing an air of superiority on those mentees. This promoted the creation of a safe environment where each member felt respected and was able to trust the other members within the team mentorship dynamic.
- **Maintaining confidentiality** – In order for us to adhere to this element, we chose to utilise the mentorship agreement and began the process with this imperative document.
- **Being diligent in providing knowledge, wisdom and developmental support** – A structure of using meetings, interviews, and video footage, external learning opportunities with regard to overall teaching excellence, peer assessment and both verbal and written feedback was used to provide this support.
- **Maintaining vigilance with regards to the boundaries of the mentor-mentee relationship** – This is protected through the use of the mentorship agreement as agreed upon by all members of the team and was kept professional by limiting meetings to institutional facilities during working hours.
- **Acknowledging skills and experiences that each brings to the mentee-mentor relationship** – Each lecturer, despite the level of experience as a design educator, was included in all aspects of curriculum development and other module building opportunities.
- **Carefully framing advice and feedback** – Mentors provided written documentation and recorded meetings for mentees to keep and use for further reflection (CCTS 2015) .

Ethical Behavior is grounded in Community

As highlighted above, we as educators and mentors first, and secondly, as designers, have a responsibility in being ethical in our day to day decisions. This ethical behavior that we possess is further influenced by our individual morality; grounded within each of us and largely built on the beliefs and values entrenched in our communities, culture, and society at large. It is important to

² The aspects presented above were adapted by the CCTS with permission from the Institute for Clinical Research Education Mentoring Resources, University of Pittsburgh www.icre.pitt.edu/mentoring/overview.html and the Oregon Clinical and Translational Research Institute, Oregon Health & Science University <http://www.ohsu.edu/xd/education/schools/school-of-medicine/faculty/mentoring>.

remember that while ethics can be taught, as noted by Piper, et. al. (1993), ethical behavior involves many aspects of who we are as human beings that ultimately affect our belief of “the self” in relation to those around us. These aspects involve attitudes, values, thoughts, feelings, and actions and help us to relate, connect and respond to others around us. This essentially influences the responsibility we have and feel for others, providing a sense of caring which ultimately allows for one to act in an ethical manner in order to achieve a sense of integrity as we reach for that which we feel responsible (Noddings 1984). Furthermore, if someone or something exists and is part of our community, it is likely that it will be more difficult to inflict harm upon them (Weathersby & White, 2004).

While curriculum revision is part of the solution, as a faculty we need to recognise that while students may learn what we teach, they also learn from who we are and how we act in the milieu of the academic workplace. “Our values, attitudes and beliefs are conveyed to students whether we are conscious of it or not. Students learn from what is omitted as well as what is emphasised” (Weathersby & White 2004).

For these values and attitudes to influence our students, we need to first realise the impact of professional ethics in the classroom environment as well as our interactions with the students themselves in that same setting. Additionally, we need to focus on curriculum design in order to maintain and model the high standards of ethics we wish to instill in our students (Weathersby & White 2004).

Community of Practice

The concept of a community of practice provided the team mentoring approach with direction and purpose. Wenger (1998) suggests that we all belong to communities of practice, sometimes without realizing. He suggests that we are all informally bound by what each member of a particular ‘community’ or group does together due to the shared practice. This practice is further represented by common goals, a collective understanding and shared vocabulary.

He further iterates that there are various stages of development within the constructs of communities of practice which are highlighted in the graphic shown below:

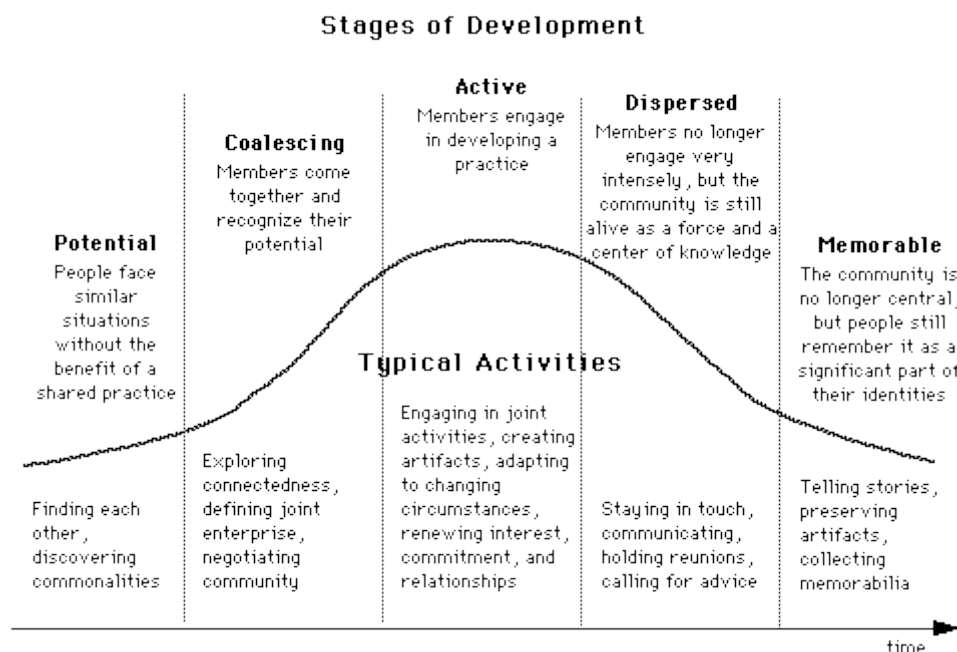


Figure 2: Stages of Development – Communities Of Practice (Wenger E. , 1998)

As the four main members (graphic design lecturers) of this study, the mentors and mentees share these commonalities due to our experience of design in the real world. It is from this basis that we are able to find common ground on which to build this community of practice. Further development within this construct allows for internal reflection and more importantly reflective practice between each other.

Furthermore, other members of the institution's development team were also included into aspects of our Team Mentoring structure to enhance the abilities that a community of practice could offer the study. While the two other members did not share the background and experience of design, they did provide a platform for our shared experience of being educators. This allowed the members to focus on the educational pursuits of our practice in line with our pursuits as designers.

The following excerpt from one of the mentees' reflections, best describes this, *"My understanding of e-Portal over the past 10 months was very minimal. I simply used it for what I had to use it for. After the meeting with Monique (Education Innovation Consultant) my mind was blown away. I had no idea how powerful it was and how closely linked it was to my other goals"*.

Currently, the team find ourselves situated at the 'active' stage, where each member is contributing to the development of a new curriculum. There is trust and all members are actively engaged in the process.

However, it is imperative to note, that while the concept of communities of practice gave the team purpose, the 'active' stage would only have been achieved at a later stage had it not been for the Team Mentoring approach. Wenger (1998) states that, "No community can fully design the learning of another; but conversely no community can fully design its own learning".

Team Mentorship therefore provides a space in which informal leadership can assist in developing mentees and their own. He postulates that this is because a community of practice, though fluid in its construct, does require a level of leadership in order to develop. He further proposes that while a community of practice will naturally self-organise, they will "flourish when their learning fits with their organisational environment". Wenger (1998) believes while providing a focus on institutional responsibilities, ethics and accountability.

Research Approach

Action Research

This study made use of action research as a research approach to study how introducing team mentoring to the authors' mentoring practice could create a safe environment in which collaboration could take place. This type of research design lends itself to the incorporation of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. (Hughes 1997) sees action research as being action and research in the same process. Action research does not result in action for research (doing in order to increase understanding), nor is it research for action (increasing knowledge in order to be applied in a later stage), but action research is the coming together of the two purposes of action and research in a single project or process (Hughes 1997). The aim of this study is to apply action and research together, to bring about a positive contribution to the personal and professional development of both mentees and mentors.

In Ear-Slater's (2002) view, action research has the potential to generate genuine and sustained improvements in practice because it can offer greater feelings of ownership of action and of analysis. Action research offers insight into real life issues, constraints and solutions as well as new opportunities to reflect on and assess work. McNiff (2002) takes the idea of action research further in that she describes it as 'practitioner based research', a form of self-reflection that reveals a process the practitioner has gone through in order to achieve a better understanding of oneself, so that one can continue developing oneself and ultimately one's work thereby promoting accountability.



Figure 1: Action Research Cycle (McNiff, 2002)

Participants

The participants of this study are:

Mentors: Two senior lecturers (also the authors of this study) from the Creative Arts and Communication faculty at Midrand Graduate institute

Other mentors: Two MGI Education Innovation Consultants from the Research and Eduvate division who provide learning opportunities for furthering one's teaching practice

Mentees: Two junior (new) lecturers from the Creative Arts and Communication faculty at Midrand Graduate institute who require mentoring in the context of their teaching practice and professional development.

Data Collection

Action research can be seen as a strategy to gather information and is not limited to one single method. For the purpose of this study a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods were used to gather data.

Quantitative methods included:

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were provided to the four graphic design lecturers who make up the core of the team mentoring unit. First, the two mentors completed the tests and showed the mentees what the tests entailed. Thereafter, taking confidentiality into account, the mentees were presented with the choice to complete these tests and/ or share the outcomes with the team. As mentioned in our literature review, team mentoring supports team building and mutual competency development within a safe environment and due to this, members of the team did not feel uncomfortable with sharing information within the confines of this study. Furthermore, the results of these questionnaires guided us in understanding each other better but were by no means an integral part of the study. Had a member requested to not share information, for instance, they would still engage in the informal discussions in which we used the questionnaire results as guidance. That being said, however, having the members of the team engage in these tests and feel comfortable with sharing the information, assisted us tremendously in guiding the study forwards at a quicker pace.

Since no member felt violated or threatened by the types of questions and/ or implications (direct or perceived) of sharing these results, they were then used to determine the learning style preferences, brain dominance and multiple intelligence of the mentees and mentors.

The following online tests were utilised:

1. Marc Accetta Personality Test - <http://marcaccetta.com/personality-test.php>
2. Character Strength Profile Test - <https://www.viame.org/survey/Account/Register?>
3. Team Building personality test - <http://www.humanmetrics.com/hr/business/staffdevelopment.aspx>
4. Team Roles test - <http://www.123test.com/team-roles-test/>
5. Fun A Team test (to compare to the serious tests) - <http://www.qfeast.com/personality/quiz/19401/What-A-Team-character-are-you-most-like>

Self-assessment questionnaires were also used to determine the respective readiness of the mentors and mentees in conjunction with student assessment of mentees' teaching.

Qualitative methods included:

Observation of the mentees during their facilitation of a learning opportunity - observing the mentee in their work environment as they dealt with students and course material. This provided the foundation for more thorough feedback sessions that enhanced the mentees understanding of their role as a facilitator within the classroom environment. This led to further feedback sessions regarding setting up learning opportunities to incite certain evoked knowledge within the classroom. We predominantly used informal techniques of discussion and interviews with students to ascertain specific knowledge regarding planned lessons and lecturer interaction.

Reflection - Reflection occurred on a weekly basis. We asked our mentees to provide an informal journal of commentary based on their weekly tasks as set out in their work schedule. We then asked them to answer specific questions in the form of reflection after class visits or discussions with the mentors. These "teaching journals" acted as an additional source of information for us as mentors to take note of the day-to-day issues faced by new (younger) lecturers. The reflection assisted in further discussion through interviews, as to how these issues were or should be dealt with in the future, in a more thorough manner.

Recording of mentorship sessions

We used recording devices such as video and voice recorders as well as note-taking for these sessions. We asked our mentees to take notes as well so that we could compare what we found to be interesting and informative versus their own expectations. This assisted both us, as the mentors, and our mentees in seeing both viewpoints on a continual basis.

Mentees personal development plans

The mentees were initially asked by the mentors to complete certain tasks and to provide them with this information so that the development of the individuals could be discussed and further suggestions could be made on how this related to the development of the team as a whole. This resulted in interviews, team discussions and the use of informal methods such as email, Whatsapp, Facebook and our tablets to provide information between the mentors and mentees. The informal methods provided an open platform for discussion and communication which benefits the team relationship.

The use of qualitative data was imperative in our research as the team relied on the individual resources and traits that each member brought to the unit as a unique member responsible for their own development, as well as the overall development of the whole. The individuality is highlighted by having used various methods of research acquisition namely; technology, social networks, interviews and discussions.

Conclusion

The present paper proposes how introducing team mentoring in a design education faculty creates an environment of mutual agreement, where design educators are encouraged to collaborate and be accountable for their actions.

Having looked at the murky waters of ethics in design, we can see why the prospect of working within the team mentoring dynamic is of the utmost importance as it provides for the opportunity in creating a shared ethical culture. Additionally, team mentoring fosters leadership and accountability through the shared ethos provided by the team members. Sharing of information and experience can assist the lecturers to cultivate an individual and professional expectation of ethics and accountability. This collaborative milieu develops a strong sense of community of practice which ultimately helps to enhance the team.

When we look back to the reflective notes acquired within the confines of our study, we notice that mentors and mentees both acquired, shared and grew from this knowledge. We concluded that before the start of this team mentorship process, each of us had always focused on the end result rather than to realise and take opportunity in the journey of our educational endeavors.

Having learned from this experience, the recommendations for other team-mentoring opportunities would be to meet consistently (both formally and informally), discuss relevant issues and provide feedback. Furthermore the aspects of scheduling, documenting and tracking progress is of the utmost importance so as to make it a meaningful process, as this is where the true learning and development lies.

As four lecturers who work hand in hand, in daily activities, and more importantly, in developing a brand new curriculum being launched in 2016, this exercise and research was influential in creating a syllabus that looks at the core of our students. It is a syllabus that will not only teach the principles and elements of design, but will instil within our new students, the imperative ideals that a 21st century designer needs to truly succeed in the real world. Furthermore, it will provide them with the ability to decipher between right and wrong. The ability of the team to work together with a common goal, irrespective of our diverse backgrounds, provided the founding footsteps for growth; growth in each of us and more importantly, in each of our students and the faculty at large.

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